

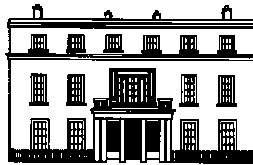
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs
REPORT**

**Donabate Community College,
Donabate, County Dublin.
Roll number: 761040**

Date of inspection: 11 February 2014



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL
NEEDS**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	10 and 11 February 2014
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and special educational needs team• Discussion with special-needs assistant• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and special educational needs team

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good.
- The school provides an autism-friendly learning environment for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).
- The timetabling of all of the allocated resource teaching hours is not clearly documented.
- The school has engaged successfully with an individual planning process.
- There are too many teachers involved in resource teaching and current timetabling practices can have unhelpful effects on students with additional needs.
- The school engages in a range of good practices to promote numeracy and literacy development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The school should further develop team teaching as an alternative model of support for students with additional learning needs.
- Management should ensure that the utilisation of the resource teaching and learning support allocation of hours is used for the purposes intended and clearly documented.
- The school should further develop the autism unit enrolment policy.
- The school should endeavour to minimise the number of teachers engaged in resource teaching while developing a small core team of special educational needs (SEN) specialists.

INTRODUCTION

Donabate Community College is a co-educational school under the auspices of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board with a current enrolment of 733 students. The school opened in September 2008 and caters for a diverse student population. Programmes currently offered are the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good. Lessons were purposeful and appropriate to student needs. Teachers used careful pacing, repetition and reinforcement to good effect.
- In the three lessons observed in the school's autism unit, appropriate and autism-friendly methodologies were in use and the communication, social and academic needs of the students' were being met. There was good use of eye contact and naming and visual information. Students were fully engaged in learning and intent on completing appropriate work to the best of their abilities.
- Resource lessons focused on targeted support for learning in subject lessons. Some teachers effectively used visual and graphic supports to explain and reinforce learning. There was a good focus on the development of subject-specific vocabulary for comprehension, reading and writing.
- Direct instruction was the predominant methodology employed by resource teachers. Best practice was observed in the varied teaching and learning methodologies employed by some teachers which included questioning, paired work, discussion, and use of information and communications technology (ICT).
- Most teachers began lessons with an outline of the clearly stated learning objectives. A minority of teachers used the outcomes to summarise learning. This good practice encourages students to reflect on their learning and should be promoted.
- A range of formal and informal assessment practices are in place. Enrolling students undertake a cognitive ability assessment before entry and the results are analysed and used to help identify students who will require support teaching. Further standardised and diagnostic tests are administered to inform decisions around the provision of support teaching.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- First-year students are grouped in mixed-ability classes. These continue in all subjects throughout the junior cycle with the exception of Irish and Maths which are banded from second year on the basis of formal test results and teacher assessment.
- The provision includes individual and small group support, and more recently, the commencement of team-teaching. The school should further extend the use of team-teaching for the many benefits it can offer in terms of addressing the needs of students who do not have allocated hours or who do not wish to be withdrawn from lessons.

- Hours allocated to the school for resource teaching were not fully documented and accounted for in the timetable. Management should ensure that the utilisation of the resource teaching and learning support allocation of hours is used for the purposes intended and clearly documented.
- The school successfully hosts a designated unit for the support of students with ASD. The unit is well equipped and staffed, and provides a place for individualised instruction as well as respite and relaxation to meet the students' complex needs. While students attend for some instruction in the unit, they are integrated into mainstream lessons with their peers as much as is possible and practical.
- The ASD provision is overseen by a co-ordinator. The school should further develop the autism unit enrolment policy with a description of the work of the unit and the provision, particularly the autism-specific targeted interventions, and information on the roles of all personnel involved in the provision.
- The organisational, planning and administrative role played by the SEN co-ordinator is significant. Both the autism-unit co-ordinating teacher and SEN co-ordinator are appropriately qualified and provide ongoing support and advice to resource and mainstream teachers.
- Eleven subject teachers have been timetabled with the hours allocated to provide support for students with SEN. Support can become fragmented across such a wide range of teachers and can take from the quality of the provision and of the learning. The school should endeavour to minimise the number of teachers engaged in resource teaching while developing a small core team of SEN specialists.
- The school engages in a number of good practices and initiatives to promote literacy and numeracy development. Literacy and numeracy committees have been established with responsibility for developing and implementing a whole-school approach. The school is encouraged to develop an assessment strategy for literacy and numeracy to guide the tracking of student progress as well as the identification of specific students who should be targeted for intervention.
- Four special-needs assistants are assigned to the ASD unit and a further four are assigned to support specific individuals with care needs. They are very aware of their roles and focus appropriately on promoting student independence and self-regulation.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The SEN policy clearly outlines the vision, rationale and aims of the school's provision. The policy includes useful information on the organisation of the support, and the roles and responsibilities of staff. When the SEN policy is next reviewed, information on the role and work of mainstream teachers in providing inclusive instruction should be included.

- The SEN co-ordinator prepares learning profiles for each student. These inform the planning and preparation of resource teachers. A common template used for planning facilitates regular reviews of student progress and acts as record of attainment.
 - The school has successfully engaged in the practice of individual education plans for students identified as low incidence. This process requires further development in the writing of targets which are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound.
 - A comprehensive transition programme assists the induction of incoming students and their parents. Timely liaison with, and information from feeder schools, combined with initial assessment enables the appropriate supports for incoming students with to be put in place.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and co-ordinating SEN teacher at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes the acknowledgement of quality teaching and learning in Donabate Community College. The Board welcomes the affirmation of the work of our SEN Co-ordinator and the Co-ordinator of our Autism Unit. The Board of Management appreciates the recognition of our school as an autism friendly learning environment.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

School Management welcome the support and Guidance from the report and will implement its recommendations at the earliest available opportunity.